

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015
(AFC 2014/021: 01360)
Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Rita Adamski interview, 2014-12-05 : interview conducted by Michael Robert
Bussel**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:00:28: Name is Rita Adamski. Lives in Salem, Oregon. Born in Roseburg, Oregon in 1952.

00:01:05: Previous jobs held: ward clerk in a hospital. Has worked mostly in home care or as long-term care worker. Began in nursing homes.

00:01:55: Home care work congenial when her children were small. Has worked with wide variety of clients. Has helped people in hospice care at end of life. Worked with veteran who has Gillian-Barre syndrome and helped him get to point where he could drive again. Lived with a woman for five months near the end of her life. Has helped people get back on their feet.

00:03:41: Has one permanent client now. First time as personal support worker. Client is 32-years-old. Fell as infant. Seizure and balance disorder. Non-verbal. Helps him be part of community. Marvelous example of family support. Takes him swimming. Use I-Pad to give him different choices. Likes to go bowling. Eat lunch out. Look at Christmas items.

00:05:58: Typical day. Get out of the house. Atypical day — grounded, in case of seizure, but unusual. Client has 40 Elmo dolls in his room. Stop at second-hand stores and go “Elmo shopping.” Start with bowling, if he chooses.

00:07:09: Original college studies in speech pathology and audiology. Own child had birth defect. Couldn’t finish college. Mother is registered nurse and Catholic. Grew up with mother who took care of neighbors. Sister has friend with traumatic brain injury.

00:08:40: Catholicism, passion for neighbors, feeling of community. In it together.

00:09:23: Special skills or characteristics of caregivers. Need to listen. Listen to what your boss wants, even if you think she is wrong. Help you to be independent and be who you are. Make your choices with dignity in your own home.

00:10:55: Willing to help boss have things their way. Be more humble than you want to be. Job requires certain skills such as dealing with catheters, colostomy bags, wound care. Learn about resources in the community.

00:12:42: Learned through experience. Advantage in previous work to have had registered nurse to call on. "Delegation": term related to registered nurse teaching a home care worker. Contract between patient, nurse and caregiver. Nurse teaches you a skill such as checking blood sugar. Workers can be "delegated" to do other things. Has taken classes. Most important were on preventing spread of disease and medication. Five rights of giving medication.

00:15:57: Has become close friends with former clients. If not a good match, will say so. If not a good match, sometimes will exit. On every block, someone quietly takes care of somebody.

00:17:16: Worries about getting too involved with family. Gets to know names of children and grand-children. One of biggest adventures was as respite worker. Helped man with dementia travel to South Carolina and say good-bye to his family.

00:18:38: Too much emotional involvement at times. When you love and admire someone, easy to be connected.

00:20:41: On a first-name basis with clients. Man who doesn't speak calls her "Zooey" after Sesame Street character. Called "Ditto" when family member was also named Rita.

00:21:56: Use of term "my lady" and "my man" to describe clients. Honors their privacy.

00:22:46: Jargon not used that much by caregivers. ADL: Activities of Daily Living...there are seven of them. Learned "funny looking kid" at university or FLK to describe child with problems.

00:25:38: Many different ways to be a caregiver. Best job is working with "my man" who is developmentally disabled. Has held hands with people who are dying. Will help people do what they want. Helped veteran get back on his feet. Sometimes does housekeeping and meals preparation.

00:27:10: Wound care for woman who just got out of hospital. Partner hung blue pads on tree, even though they were spoiled. Contrast this with client who had home on the bay with African art. Family support makes a difference.

00:28:28: Talks with clients. Avoid talking about politics unless we agree. People ask "why" something happened to them. Seeks conversation where she has something in common with her clients. Will say "I absolutely agree with you," if they are watching Fox News.

00:31:17: Caregivers talk about how to handle insurance problems. Talk about aspects of work that are problematic. Don't talk about "employer-clients" due to rules of confidentiality.

00:32:19: How to describe people you work with. "Client" is two-way term. Seen as equal. Doesn't like "customer" as a term. Prefers to say "employer" or "boss." Customer superficial. Client conveys something equal.

00:33:55: People who need caregivers have some kind of struggle. In it together. Try to find the positive and keep it friendly. Talks with client's mother. Marvels at her "consistency" in making mistakes. Put disposable tab on briefs on backwards for three weeks.

00:37:10: Relationships with people gratifying. Lived in small town. Prior to 1987, nursing homes were warehouses for old people. Helped Parkinson's patient stay in their own home. Help Vietnam veteran get back on his feet. Rewarding.

00:38:44: One client says she was "perfect." Another called her "precious," another "phenomenal." Jokes that dementia patients are not confused!

00:40:06: Spent hours with elderly at bedside while dying. Very isolating. Only knows five or ten out of 250 people in home care association. Doesn't see other caregivers that much. Homes not always nice to work in. Employment not always convenient. Work can be repetitive and boring.

00:42:52: Can read sometimes at work. Picks up chocolate on way home after hard day.

00:43:22: Union has made big difference in her life. Employer's mother very supportive and brought her union membership form.

00:44:44: Health insurance premiums go up. Before joining union a year ago, paid \$550 a month for insurance. More than half of income went to insurance. After joining SEIU, received 20 percent pay increase. Health insurance much less expensive.

00:46:32: Trying to learn about getting involved more in the union. Anticipates she will get more involved.

00:47:50: No difference in caring for men or women.

00:48:46: People would be surprised that home care workers "carry it in our hearts." Proud that she has helped people live the lives they want. Proud to have helped them stay out of nursing homes or assisted living a little longer.

00:50:01: Current employer...some might see disabled young man. Doing fine, not suffering. Injury is sad, but his life is pretty good. See the positive.

00:52:55: Loves to read. Involved in Beginning Experience, a faith-based grief support group. Wants to introduce granddaughter to paddling in the summer.

00:52:55: Challenging if you don't get new clients after someone has died. Took care of person with breast cancer who died. Took time off. Then had a potential client die before she even got to take care of him. Two weeks unemployed. Financial issue. Job is blessing in my heart in many ways, but can be an expensive job sometimes.

00:55:14: End of life not sad or tragic. Celebrate good a person has done and that they have had a full life. Dealing with death scary at first, but not later.

00:56:07: Helps people who are dying do what they want to do. Have coffee with girlfriend. Go to restaurant. Helps in that way.

00:56:58: End of interview.